JURSENAS SAYS APOLOGY FOR COMMUNIST CRIMES MATURED LONG AGO

VILNIUS, Mar 13, BNS - Lithuanian Parliament Chairman Ceslovas Jursenas said Monday his public apology for Communist crimes had matured long ago but he was waiting for an opportunity to "raise it to higher level."

On Saturday, in a speech to the parliament on the occasion of the 5th anniversary of Lithuania's independence restoration, Jursenas said he as a former Communist felt responsible and asked for forgiveness for those members of the Communist Party who committed crimes against the Lithuanian nation.

Jursenas, who is a member of the ruling Lithuanian Democratic Labor Party, also expressed hope that his apology would be supported by other former Communists now belonging not only to the LDLP (reformed Communists) but also the opposition Conservative Party and other political forces.

"Only by apologizing can we complete repentance and seek concord," he said.

At a press conference Monday, Jursenas said he consulted members of the LDLP and other people when preparing the statement, but added that no special permission was required from the leadership of his party.

In his opinion, the LDLP does not have to make a similar apology because it is a "completely new party" with a new program and members who never were Communists. He also noted that the LDLP has adopted a statement "On Mistakes and Crimes Committed by the LCP (Lithuanian Communist Party)."

Jursenas said the call for concord was a step made on his own initiative, adding that he would "gladly join" other such initiatives.